

## Chapter 1: This Is How It Begins

Life is a game of chess. You make one move and the next one awaits you. You don't know how the game will end, but you must trust yourself and go with the flow. Play smart, but know that some things aren't for you to decide. Know that you will struggle at some points, but it will only make you stronger and help you grow. In my experience, there was a lot of defeat and later victories.

“Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle.” — Napoleon Hill

My story is real and something most people have never experienced. Since the day I was born, I have been in a constant battle with myself and my conditions. My family wasn't what a normal family looks like, and my experiences are way different than that of anyone else.

I have had my mother be present most of the time, but she has always had her own struggles to endure. Life hasn't been simple for her; neither did I have flowers and butterflies surrounding me as a child. I don't regret the life I have had, nor do I feel bad about the challenges that I have faced. I believe they are all just some pre-conditions for growth and success, and I am glad I have had experiences that make me a stronger person every day. As they say, “Growth begins at the end of your comfort zone,” I believe these challenging times actually propelled me to fully discovering my capabilities and potential. It is under pressure that rock becomes a precious stone, and I was ready to undergo as much pressure as I could handle. I owe it to the person I am today!

Hardships were placed on my back the moment I opened my eyes to this world. None of them made me take the wrong roads. I believe what really matters is the person you turn out to be regardless of the struggles you go through. I have always been a positive person, even though negativity surrounded me from all sides. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, and that is exactly what my circumstances made me – stronger than ever! Ready to take the world by storm!

I believe in the power and strength that this positivity has given to me. I see hardships in the eye and try to fight each battle with perseverance. I believe this is the key to making your life worth living at all times, in all circumstances.

“Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results.” – Willie Nelson

Before I move to my story, I put forward who I am and what background I come from. My parents, my siblings, and my entire family have been important to me throughout my struggles. They have contributed to making me the person I am today.

My mother was born in Oakland, California, to an alcoholic mother who had eight children. My mother ran away from her home when she was 13 years old, and just like my grandmother, she got into drugs at a very young age. Soon after, when she was only 16 years old, she had her first daughter, which is my oldest sister, and then her second daughter just a year later. When she was 19 years old, I was born, and then she gave birth to my brother after two years.

Although she was young and could always have a much more comfortable life if she went back home, she never looked back after she ran away. Her life was tough, and she struggled with addiction. She met

my father with one of her friends who was pregnant with her first daughter. Later that year, I would be born and her friend's daughter would be my half-sister from my father. My mother and father continued on their rendezvous.

Sometimes, you never expect things to turn out a certain way, but when they do, you understand how unpredictable life can be. At such a delicate age, my mother didn't expect to meet a man 10 years older than her and make a family with him, but she met him. Call it fate, destiny, choice, or whatever else you like, but this event has a major role to play in my mom's life, as well as mine.

"In life's journey, you will meet all sorts of characters. Always remember, never shed a tear for the heartless, corrupt or insensitive." – Krystal

My father is from Dayton Ohio. He came from two alcoholic parents who both died very young from cirrhosis of the liver due to alcoholism. He grew up being a street kid, getting into trouble and fighting. He was approximately 10 years older than my mom, as she was only a teenager when they met. Both my parents were addicts, so when they got connected, the party continued.

My dad had an addiction to crack cocaine and gambling. He supported all those expenses through the criminal activities of robbing banks, museums, businesses, and anything that could help him get money. He was a criminal.

Back then, I did not understand any of what was happening around me, but now that I am all grown up, I understand things quite well.

Mom was a stay-at-home woman with her hidden addiction. It was hidden from us kids, as much as it could be. For obvious reasons, she didn't want us to know about it. She has always been a motivation to me. Although she was young and miserable, due to her addictions, she never failed to keep her children all together most of the time. There was never enough of her and we all craved her attention. She had highs and lows trying to manage our personal needs. The truth is I have secured a soft spot for my mother now more than ever. If I fully release the protection factor for her, the picture would not be pretty. I do understand now but growing up, her actions, her thought process, and her addictions had a huge impact on me with all of my insecurities. I have forgiven her and even accepted all of her today.

Dad hasn't been the way mom was. We have had a lot of suffering because of him. Also, he never came to us in a loving and caring manner. We moved around a lot during the first seven years of my life; state to state, school to school, East Coast to West Coast, all mostly because of him. Our reasons would be lack of places to stay in, running out of money to pay for a hotel room, or running from the police due to dad's criminal activities. Sometimes it was also because my mom was in the hospital to keep her away from dad's abuse or side effects of drug use.

I remember the time when we were all being chased by the police. All of us kids were in the backseat, my mom was in the front passenger seat, and my father was driving recklessly. We were trying to get away from the police, as he had done something for which the police were after him. They had turned the lights on and tried to pull him over, but he ran. When they finally got him to pull over, I remember them arresting him, and I ran and grabbed his leg. I was about four or five years old at that time and told the police to let my dad go. I also remember visiting him in jail.

When my father was finally caught for his last charge, we all went back to California and resided with my grandmother, for my father was sentenced to prison for six years. During that time, mom was in and out of our grandma's house - the freedom from my dad's presence had freed her wild. There was sexual abuse from one of grandma's husbands and his son, who was my mother's half-brother and my uncle. I remember a time when grandma had four twin beds in one of the three bedrooms. She lined us up youngest to oldest. My bed was second from the door.

One late evening, this old man, wrapped within a blanket, came creeping into our room, he stood at the foot of my bed, I squeezed my eyes shut, clinched to my blanket, and started to pray that he would not choose me. After a short pause, he walked his way up to my eldest sister's bed. I remember feeling grateful it wasn't me but devastated he chose her. As she whimpered, I shut down and don't recall what took place after that.

I knew this old man,

whom I didn't know well,

and what I'm about to say,

I was promised not to tell.

He placed me on his dirty knee,

and whispered inappropriate things to me,

He would come into my room late at night,

touch me and squeeze me way too tight.

He would touch me in a forbidden way,

and 'do you like this?' he would say.

I eventually told someone,

he disappeared before he could be put in jail,

but before he left he turned to me,

and said you're to live through holy hell.

Ever since that day, I have had a part of him inside of me,

that won't set me free.

I wrote this poem at the age of thirteen,

the sexual abuse I'm referring to is what had happened to me at the age of seven. – Poem by Brandi Hockett, 1990

Then eventually, we left that place and went back with mom and her new husband, John. We held it pretty well together; however, we did have to move a few times after that too. Finally, we ended up moving to Vegas when I reached the age of 11. Although I have some good memories with my mother,

like sitting under a tree, feeding her sunflower seeds, I do not recall any such memory with my father. He failed to be a good father. He was physically abusive to my mother, and his tongue was sharper than a sword. I don't remember him physically abusing me as a child, but as I got older and saw him again, and being only 13 years old, he physically abused me. This was the first time I was meeting him since I was five years old. He had physical tendencies toward me, and every time I saw him, he was very aggressive. He wasn't the usual loving and caring kind.

At times, he was a good provider to the family with all the illegal money he would get from criminal activities, but the other times he would lose all the money to gambling, and we would be homeless and starve. There were times when he would gamble all the money we had. One time of many when we were in Reno, we were kicked out and had to stay on the streets because we had nowhere to live. We used to live in hotels where you would either pay or check out, so when we had no money to pay, we had to leave.

My mom had her own issues too. She had left her family at a very young age and was bearing children soon after that. She was an addict and had certain reservations of her own. However, no matter how disturbed she would be, she tried to keep her children safe. My relationship with my mother back then I felt was more like the roles were reversed. I felt like the adult and she was the child. I do understand fully now as an adult and mother myself, that under the circumstances my mother really did do her best. I never felt the same way about dad. There were a few encounters with my mother that captured and imprinted unconditional love on me, and that connection between us has carried me through to this day.

After my father was released from prison, he became a car salesman and pulled his hands off all the illegal activities. However, he still has a sword for his tongue. I had never seen him have a real job when we lived together, and I was on the verge of cutting him off completely a couple of years ago. However, my brother made a point about life, how one day we're here and the next we're not. I heard my brother that day and adjusted my tune.

I did make healthier boundaries with my dad. I have recently been talking to him, and my relationship with him now is better than what it had been. I regularly call to check up on him, he checks up on me, and this is the first time ever in my life that we have been able to have a conversation where it can last more than 30 seconds and no one gets mad.

I have always yearned to have a real bond with my father, but I never did. This relationship wasn't built on the money he would bring in or the food he would put on our table. All I wanted was some understanding and to build a home for myself. I wanted him to be my safe place. Although mom has always attempted that for me, I wanted such a thing from dad too.

"A daughter needs a dad to be the standard against which she will judge all men." – Unknown

I learned positive and negative behaviors from both my mother and father. I do believe that a child's first seven years of life shape and structure a child's future, for those experiences can ultimately decide to influence one's path. I realize I was born into a family that essentially lacked a solid foundation and love. I thought the constant chaos was everyone's norm.

The constant movement from being homeless to a tent to a hotel room to a house boat and even to a mansion was imprinted into my brain very early on. It showed me how unpredictable life can really be. I

purposely stopped making new friends early on too. It was because my unstable life changed. It became too painful to meet new people and then have to move away abruptly.

I would not call these factors lessons, but I would call them habits, and unfortunately, I still struggle with some of these unhealthy habits today. Today I have tools in place when needed, within the positive aspects of these habits. I've always been a very resilient woman who can adjust her sails to any storm. I have also learned to be very independent, not to count on any man's hand. I learned quickly to adapt to any situation with perseverance. I became extraordinary sensitive to my surroundings. My inner radar was fully activated all along. I pay more attention to details and people's body language more than their words. Ultimately I've become my own warrior.

"I have been many women in my lifetime. I have been the protector and the provider. I have been the lover and the fighter, but the woman I value the most will always be the survivor." –S.L. Heaton